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**The Development and the Prospects of the Czech Left – the Role
of the Communist Party**

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– The Czech Social Democrats and the Communists: Pragmatism Rather than Rapprochement So Far –

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The parties of the Czech left have enjoyed a nominal majority in the House of Representatives of the Czech Parliament: the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) gained 70 seats and the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM) 41 seats during the elections in June 2002. Both parties have so far used this political potential with caution.

In this context a number of inter-related questions become relevant. Can a communist party and a social-democratic party establish a working relationship? Can “hard” and “soft” leftwing parties develop viable and compatible programmes? Is there enough space for both parties in Czech politics? Left-left co-operation could have profoundly changed the party-political constellation in the Czech Republic after 1989. Yet at the national level the coalition potential of the KSČM has remained close to zero between 1990 and 2005. The KSČM has instead played a blocking role on the Czech political scene — not unlike the French Communist Party in the 1960s and 1970s.

The KSČM has mostly viewed the situation as an unjust exclusion based solely on an anti-left and anti-communist bias. In fact, people differentiate between the first and the second. It took just two elections for the attraction of leftist concepts to re-emerge after the bureaucratic Soviet-type socialism had been dismantled in 1989. The Czechs are mainly an egalitarian society in which social justice and security is very high on the political agenda of ordinary citizens. Therefore, social inequality between ordinary citizens and politicians or senior officials is regarded as the major source of social tension in the country². People perceive social democratic and socialist political programmes as most appealing (23 and 19 percent respectively). Conservative programmes find much less support (13 percent), and the

¹ The author extends his thanks to several representatives of the KSČM and of the ČSSD (in particular to Lukáš Jelínek, advisor to Parliamentary Speaker Zaorálek, and Miloslav Had, head of a group of ČSSD experts dealing with foreign policy issues). The discussions of the issues at hand were essential for understanding some of the processes in both parties. For the author's earlier analysis of the KSČM, written for the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, see Vladimír Handl: *Die Tschechische Kommunistische Partei: orthodoxes Fossil oder erfolgreiche neo-kommunistische Protestpartei?* - Bonn: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, *Internat. Politik-Analyse*, 2002 (Politikinformation Osteuropa ; 105) see <http://library.fes.de/fulltext/id/01425.htm>

attraction of communist and radical anarchist programmes is marginal (4 and 1 percent respectively).³ The attitude towards the KSČM has thus been formed by the party's image and by the public's general level of (dis)satisfaction with politics – not so much by the alleged anti-left bias. However, decreasing trust in party politics allowed the KSČM to emerge as an acceptable party of political protest.

Against this background, increasing co-operation between the ČSSD and the KSČM has developed. Looking back over the past 15 years, pragmatic approaches have fostered mutual practical co-operation on a number of issues, primarily at the local level but increasingly in Parliament. However, the KSČM's ambiguous nature, identity and divergences as well as the competition between the KSČM and the ČSSD have so far prevented a genuine rapprochement between the two main leftwing parties.

I. The political strategies of the ČSSD and the KSČM

The trajectories of the parties have differed substantially, yet they had some similarities.

The ČSSD, re-established in November 1989, sought to develop into what has been called in the literature a 'mass programmatic party' of the left. However, it found it difficult to make leftwing ideology acceptable after society's highly conservative-liberal swing.

The party then experienced a rebirth as a distinctly democratic left party, challenging the conservative-liberal government head-on. The party's traditional leftist image, linked with the charismatic and controversial leader Miloš Zeman, placed the party in the position of a democratic leftwing alternative, attractive to a wide spectrum of voters ranging from the centre to the hard left.

While in government (continuously since 1998), the party's image has become more ambiguous. The ČSSD minority government (1998-2002) depended on its main rival for support (see for example the so-called opposition treaty of 1998 and 2000 with the Civic Democratic Party, ODS), whereas the second government included smaller centrist parties (the Christian-Democratic Union–Czech Peoples Party, KDU-ČSL, and the Freedom Union, US). Politics moved the party into a position closer to the political centre.

The government's agenda — completing the transition to a market economy, accession to NATO and, primarily, the EU — also moved the party towards the centre. The ČSSD-led governments had to develop the institutional and legislative framework for a capitalist

² Differences between politicians and citizens cause major tension – poll, CTK, 20.12. 05, http://www.ceskenoviny.cz/news/index_vview.php?id=163694

economy, increase the dynamics of economic growth, attract foreign direct investment, and import and implement the EU's *acquis communautaire*. The traditional leftist agenda — strengthening the welfare state, education, and culture — could hardly be the top and only priority. In addition, numerous corruption scandals tainted the party's image in general.

Faced with competition on the radical left (the KSČM), the party inevitably began to lose public support. The party's electoral performance has been in gradual decline since the electoral success of 1998. While the party gained 32.3 percent of the votes in 1998, its performance decreased in 2002 slightly (30.2 percent) only to fall dramatically in 2004. During the regional elections in November 2004, the ČSSD won 14 percent of the votes (an even worse result than the catastrophic 14.7 percent in 2000). More importantly, the ČSSD failed to attract a wider spectrum of voters during the first elections to the European Parliament, with only 8.8 percent of the votes, and thus two seats.⁴ Then, party Chairman and Prime Minister Špidla had to resign, and Stanislav Gross became his even less fortunate successor.

According to some, the party split into several streams. A 'Blairite' stream, inspired by the British Prime Minister's "Third Way" concept is best represented by the Minister of Finance Sobotka. This stream prefers to face the challenges of the current economic situation by mainly using market instruments.

A more leftist group within the ČSSD, established in 2004 by the former Minister of Foreign Affairs Kavan and the Chairman of the Committee for Foreign Affairs of the Czech House of Representatives Vladimír Laštuvka, has yet to prove its viability. The Minister of Labour and Social Affairs Škromach has been seen as the representative of the majority of the traditional left wing, which decries the social impact of the British policies, and focuses on defending the welfare state.

The 2006 elections will show whether the party will further differentiate along the socialist left/liberal left axis. For the time being, the current Prime Minister Jiří Paroubek (ČSSD) has managed to unify the party. With an assertive, pragmatic approach he seeks to strengthen the available potential, and thus prevent what seemed an inevitable outcome of the recent internal crisis in the party: the loss of the parliamentary elections in June 2006.⁵ Paroubek introduced an unprecedented level of discipline into the party, among other things by seizing the power

³ Šamanová, Gabriela: Pravo-levá orientace, představy o nejpřijatelnějším politickém programu a názory na roli státu, *TISKOVÁ ZPRÁVA*, Centrum pro výzkum veřejného mínění, Sociologický ústav AV ČR, 12.12.2005

⁴ <http://www.volby.cz/pls/ep2004/ep11?xjazyk=EN>, 10.12.2005, p.3.

of veto over nominations for the parliamentary elections in 2006. Such a radical centralisation of power in the hands of a single leader and his closest associates indicates the strategy of an effective ‘electoral party’. At the same time, Paroubek linked his destiny to the electoral results: should the ČSSD under his leadership fail to secure less than 30 percent of the vote, he will resign from his post.⁶

The *KSČM* remained a rare example of an only half-way reformed communist party in Central Europe. From a medium term perspective, the party has been successful — it has outlived the transformation from the almighty ruling state party into a competitor in an open political space.

Their chosen strategy, labelled in academic discourse as the “strategy of leftist retreat”, put the preservation of the mass membership base at its centre. Such a decision was linked with the radical decentralisation of the party, greatly enhancing the role of the district party organisations and the predominantly conservative, elderly and less-educated grassroots. The shift proved to be of crucial importance: younger and reform-minded members had to leave the party, and the membership base became dominated by the lower aged strata of the former ruling class (officials and intelligence).⁷

The party remained internally split. The “conservatives” (Marxist-Leninists) represent the most influential stream, and are constantly challenged by the minority group of modernisers/neo-communists, who seek to transform the introverted party into a “new democratic left”. The majority members are traditionalists, less ideologically informed than the conservatives or modernisers/neo-communists. The traditionalists identify themselves with the name and symbols of the party, its historical narrative and familiar language; when focusing on day-to-day politics, a number of traditionalists behave rather pragmatically, as long as the identity of the party is not questioned. Inevitably, the traditionalists have generally stood closer to the conservatives than to the modernisers/neo-communists. With their support, the conservatives have established and exercised a “cultural hegemony” over the party since 1993, among other things through the party’s daily, *Haló noviny*.

In its programmes, the party has been helped by a great deal of ambiguity: while the dramatic shift towards social democracy is hard to dispute, the party’s aim of revolutionary, systemic

⁵ Miroslav Grebeníček, the Chairman of the KSČM, himself supported in the KSČM Central committee in June 2005 the attempt of the conservative-liberal ODS to dismantle the ČSSD-led government by a vote of non-confidence.

⁶ Mitrofanov, Alexandr, Vše na jednu kartu, *Právo*, 12.12.2005

change still remains at the core of its identity. At the same time, the party's programme lacks any elaborated definition of "socialism". The 6th party congress of May 2004 (held in České Budějovice) decided, that the party would elaborate on its vision of socialism. However, the drafting process has reportedly been very slow, given the lack of unity in the party in addition to the limited human resources available.

The ambiguity of the party is even more evident when it comes to politics. The KSČM has been largely passive on issues like minority rights, environmental protection, human rights or development aid efforts. At the same time it has been close to the conservative-liberal Civic Democratic Party (ODS) on a number of foreign policy issues, sharing predilection towards nation state prerogatives. In an unprecedented move, the party supported its ideological rival, Václav Klaus, former ODS Chairman, in his bid for President in March 2003.

Nonetheless, the party has experienced an unprecedented growth in electoral support since the late 1990s. It gained 13.3 percent of the votes in 1990, 14.5 percent in 1992, 10.3 percent in 1996, 11 percent in 1998 and 18.5 percent in 2002. While the ratio between party members and non-members in the KSČM's electorate was 1:2.5 in 1990, it shifted to 1:7 in 2002.⁸ The party received an astonishing 20.3 percent of the votes (6 seats) in the first ever European elections in the Czech Republic.⁹ Unsurprisingly, the 6th party congress reaffirmed the hegemony of the conservatives and weakened the position of the modernisers in the party leadership.¹⁰

However, the performance of the party has been more problematic since then. During the elections for the regional assemblies in November 2004 the KSČM lost some of its positions. The party received 19.7 percent of the votes (23.3 percent of seats), remaining the second strongest regional political force after the conservative-liberal ODS.¹¹ While the leadership expected ever-growing support for the party, the KSČM lost some 1.5 percent. More importantly, its electoral support once again failed to translate into direct political gains: the party continued to be ignored as a coalition partner in all regions. It has become clear that the KSČM has mostly attracted frustrated "protest-voters", and those who sought to punish the

⁷ Heller, Josef, *Bída analýzy aneb Co překroutili analytici ČSSD*, 2003, *Alternativy* (14), p.28). In 2005, the party had approximately 94.000 members, with an average age of 68.

⁸ Vacek, Luboš, *K příčinám úspěchu KSČM ve volbách*, 2002, *Alternativy* (10), p.9.

⁹ <http://www.volby.cz/pls/ep2004/ep11?xjazyk=EN>, 10.12.2005

¹⁰ Miloslav Ransdorf lost his first ever direct challenge for the chairmanship of the party. Vlastimil Balín was pushed out of his position simply by the abolishment of his post of First Deputy Chairman, Zuzka Rujbrová chose not to run for the post of a deputy Chairwoman, and called Miroslav Grebeníček, then the Chairman, to do the same. Since the congress, there has only been one representative of the group of modernisers — Jiří Dolejš.

¹¹ The data of all election results were obtained at the official election server of the Czech election commission, where they are available also in English - <http://www.volby.cz/pls/kz2004/kz?xjazyk=EN&xdatum=20041105/>, 10.12.2005

ČSSD for its performance as the governing party. The communist success in the “zero-sum game” between the KSČM and the ČSSD as regards electoral support did not, however, solve the party’s basic problem: the KSČM has not become the point of reference for the alternative left.

Between 2004 and 2005, there was an increasing awareness that the party had to seek answers to the questions about its future. This soul-searching has been further pushed by the option of co-operation with the ČSSD, and even further but the “EU-isation” of the party, a result of the party’s gradual involvement in EU-related policy, institutions and networks, including the European Left Party, or ELP. This is true even though the conservatives declined to join the ELP for ideological reasons. They view the supranational party as “euro-communist” and, implementing an ideological “leftist retreat”, they take the orthodox positions of the communist movement of 1970-1980 and thus reject “euro-communism” as an unprincipled reformist strategy.

The new situation has resulted in two processes. On the one hand, the party, shrinking due to the over-aged membership base, is now working hard to increase the number of young candidates on its electoral lists at the local, regional and national level. As a number of its candidates are not members of the party, this might increase the trend towards the gradual pragmatism and “EU-isation” of its politics.

On the other hand, the situation activated the conservative circles, which see their position in the party potentially in danger. The Chairman of the party Miroslav Grebeníček, a centrist politician, who had tied his position with the hegemony of the conservatives, stepped down in October 2005 having given a remarkable example of poor judgment regarding his own standing within the party in October 2005. His reluctant successor, Vojtěch Filip, the Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Czech Parliament, a pragmatist with a largely conservative ideological mind-set, has been backed by the conservatives, traditionalists and accepted by the modernisers/neo-communists. However, he has not been really at the heart of the conservative group. A leader without a leading vision, he may be forced to give up his position as Chairman in case that the elections of 2006 will be unsuccessful.¹²

II. Examples of left-left rapprochement and co-operation

Co-operation between the two parties has developed at the local level, including left-left city councils in such important cities as Ostrava and Havířov, and increasingly also in the national

parliament. Both Vladimír Špidla and Stanislav Gross, while negotiating to form coalition governments in 2002 and 2004, left open the option of the ČSSD voting with the KSČM in the parliamentary process. Evidently, the ČSSD now widely accepts the situation with the KSČM as a reality: all social-democratic streams rejected a recent proposal to ban the KSČM, put forward by a group of independent Senators, as it would “pave the way to the hell” of undemocratic practices.¹³

According to some analysis, the ČSSD and the KSČM co-operated on 16 of 18 legislative acts and a number of other decisions proposed by the ČSSD in the House of Representatives during the second half of 2005.¹⁴ Among them were:

- The amendment to regulations concerning construction activities and the law on expropriating land of public interest;
- The establishment of checks over the General Health Insurance Company;
- The law transforming hospitals into public non-profit organisations;
- The law reforming the current system of social benefits;
- The amendment to the law on the social and legal protection of children;
- The bill on sickness benefits;
- The amendment to the higher education law providing students from poor families with scholarships;
- The investigation into the privatisation of petrochemicals holding Unipetrol (a communist deputy became Chairman of the parliamentary commission on the investigation);
- The law on non-profit hospitals (to be debated in Parliament in January 2006);
- The law on registered partnerships of homosexuals;
- The process of stripping Vladimír Doležal, an ODS deputy, of judicial immunity;
- The new amendment to the church law;
- The law ending the restitution process.

More generally, the KSČM backed the government against the Central bank, which criticised the government for excessive spending.¹⁵ Jiří Paroubek was not less forthcoming: he defended

¹² Filip himself defined success as winning more votes than in 2002, therefore over-passing the level of 18,5 percent of the votes.

¹³ Zaorálek, Lubomír (the Speaker of the Parliament, ČSSD), Proč jsem signatáře nepotěšil, *Právo* 21.10.05, similarly the Prime Minister Paroubek in his article: Je moudré zrušit KSČM? *Právo*, 11.10.2005

¹⁴ Holub, Petr, Ve sněmovně se už testují příští koalice, *Hospodářské noviny*, HN.IHNED.CZ 23. 12. 2005

¹⁵ Tůmova ostrá kritika pohoršila levici, *Hospodářské noviny*, HN.IHNED.CZ 23. 12. 2005

the existence of the KSČM; he removed all barriers to his own communication with the communist leadership and even supported — in a rather symbolic step — the KSČM's attempt to abolish the “lustration law”.¹⁶ After having been harshly criticised for this by his coalition partners, the oppositional ODS, and also by the ČSSD itself, he changed his approach. As a test of how far Paroubek dared to go in his rapprochement with the KSČM, the issue showed the Prime Minister as a self-assured politician ready to take risks and alter his position on the way to a more distant goal: winning the elections of June 2006.

There are, however, areas, where co-operation remains a taboo:

- The direct participation of the KSČM in the government at the national level;
- The indirect participation of the KSČM in a minority ČSSD government by regular and institutional support;
- Left-left coalitions at the regional council level.

The formal reason for these restrictions is the ČSSD's Bohumín Congress resolution (1995), which excluded coalition governments with the KSČM. More importantly, though, the nature and image of the KSČM deterred the ČSSD from opening up to full co-operation.

III. In Search of an Explanation of the KSČM's and ČSSD's attitudes

The KSČM

The KSČM's nature and internal development has been the greatest determinant defining the pace and scope of the left-left confluence. The communist party has been in a paradoxical situation: as shown above, it has on the one hand experienced impressive successes in 2002-2004. The resultant euphoria also greatly influenced its internal development: the coalition of the “leftist retreat” (a joint position of conservatives and traditionalists) viewed the advancement of the party as their immediate success. Consequently, they enhanced their position in the leadership and prevented any substantial adjustment of the party's programme, political attitude, internal discourse and image.

On the other hand, the party leadership has been increasingly unsure about the outcome of the 2006 elections: the regional elections in November 2004 proved that the party's election potential is rather unstable and its coalition potential negligible. Will the party be able to repeat its success in 2006, and will it still be an attractive option in the 2010 elections, if it

¹⁶ The lustration legislation provides the screening of all state officials at mid- and high levels, as well as

cannot deliver ‘policy goods’ at the regional and national levels? As a rule, the non-communist left has been repelled from the KSČM by the party’s orthodox Marxist-Leninist image. And unless the social-economic situation deteriorates, support by protest voters may drop considerably.

These factors and the ČSSD’s offer, most explicitly defined by Jiří Paroubek, to work together now and in the future, set off four general types of reaction in the party:

Determined (ideological) continuity means an ideological position insisting on the persistence of the struggle against capitalism and wary of the “reformist” ČSSD, as well as of modernisers/neo-communists in the KSČM itself. The party is viewed — following the Leninist concept of a revolutionary party — as the main achievement and instrument of the left. As such, the party must be preserved in its ideological purity to exercise the role of the avant-garde and hegemon of the left in the ČR, and potentially on the European level. The attitude towards the ČSSD is comparable with that towards the European Left Party: joining-in (seeking a coalition with the ČSSD) might dilute the communist nature of the KSČM, so they prefer to keep distance from both the ELP and the ČSSD and to co-operate instead on an ad-hoc basis. Full involvement is desirable only if the communist identity prevails and the KSČM takes the leading position. So, figuratively speaking, the ambition is the “Bolshevisation” of the “euro-communist” and non-communist left. Determined continuity has generally been the position of conservative circles and the young leftist radicals, the Communist Union of Youth.

Pragmatic (opportunist) continuity has often been the position of less ideologically focused conservatives and representatives of the traditionalist majority at or close to the age of retirement — both among deputies and party functionaries at the higher level. They either see no need for radical change or are afraid that any substantial transformation could endanger the coherence of the party. On the contrary, maintaining the status quo guarantees the survival of the party and the re-election of a number of the elder deputies and functionaries, at least in the short-term. Any co-operation with the ČSSD can continue as long as it does not question the party’s identity and thus weaken its power base — the support of the disciplined and dedicated conservative and traditionalist members.

Pragmatic (opportunist) change has been a position held among the younger and mid-age traditionalist functionaries and deputies in urban centres, and it is policy, rather than ideologically, oriented. This view concerns the political and professional future of this group,

politicians and judges, etc. for former co-operation with the communist elite.

which is worried of the problem of the ageing and still largely isolated party. These circles support co-operation with the wider left, including pragmatic adjustments of the KSČM itself. Potentially, this group is open to full-scale co-operation and rapprochement with the ČSSD. The readiness of younger and mid-age representatives to clash with the conservatives, who elevated them into their posts, has not yet been tested. In any case the group represents a slowly growing minority in the party.

Determined change has been demanded by the modernisers and neo-communists at least since 2002. This stream has views divergent from the ČSSD's approach on a number of political and ideological issues. However, they demand a change in the KSČM itself to prepare it for co-operation and make it acceptable to the ČSSD and other parts of the non-communist left. The 6th party congress has weakened this group; whether or not its ideas have started to influence the more mainstream thinking in the party will perhaps be seen only after the 2006 elections.

The position of Chairman Vojtěch Filip has traditionally been close to the *pragmatic continuity* position with focus on practical policy transactions with the ČSSD, as well as with the ODS and other parties. The preservation of the anti-reform status quo thus prevails, as proved by the party conferences at the district and regional levels in late 2005. Yet the *determined change* option has remained in the minds of many reform-minded members of the party, as well as their conservative opponents. Apprehensive of any substantial transformation, the conservatives try to secure their positions in parliament and in the party leadership. They have been working towards replacing Jiří Dolejš as Deputy Chairman. The top nominees for the Prague seats in the 2006 Parliamentary elections come exclusively from conservative circles (Exner, Beneš, Semelová) and have allegedly been agreed upon even with the truly Stalinist Communist Party (KSČ).¹⁷ The Bolshevisation of the party, as sarcastically pointed out by Senator Balín (KSČM), is close to be complete.¹⁸ Left-left co-operation, like the attitude to the radical non-communist left in the EU, has thus become one of the divisive issues in the internal development of the party.

The ČSSD

For the ČSSD, the question of co-operation with the KSČM is less an issue of internal coherence. Instead, the debate centres on the question of how the KSČM should be perceived.

¹⁷ The tiny Stalinist replication of the former ruling party, established in 1991, is led by Miroslav Štěpán, the pre-1989 chairman of the KSČ in Prague.

Secondly, the ČSSD's electoral chances, shaped by the Czech political and social constellations, or the so-called "national opportunity structure", come into consideration. In the latter context, a new situation has developed. Not only the KSČM, but also the conservative-liberal ODS increasingly needs to participate directly in politics at the national level; after seven years in opposition, its attractiveness as a political actor is at stake.

While the ČSSD has already been engaged in pragmatic co-operation with the KSČM for years, there are differences concerning the extent to which the KSČM is viewed as a genuine partner.

- At the right of the spectrum, the *left liberals* maintain an anti-communist position. They perceive the KSČM as still largely unreformed, not ready or able for a true reflection regarding the past and ideologically ambiguous on human rights, the role of the state in politics and economics and external orientation.
- The *traditional leftwing*, including the majority of the grassroots, has largely been open to a rapprochement with the KSČM on the basis of democratic socialism. At the same time, the grassroots and local organisations often view the KSČM as acceptable as it is. The higher representatives of the traditional leftwing, however, demand further reforms of the communist party.
- The *centrist pragmatists* have been less concerned with ideology. For this group, with Jiří Paroubek at the fore, issues of programme matter as far as policy outcomes are concerned, and co-operation has been perceived as a dynamic trial-and-error exercise.

Deriving from this internal division, at least three scenarios of co-operation with the KSČM should be considered: genuine rapprochement, pragmatic instrumentalisation of ad-hoc co-operation, and "Mitterrandisation" of the ČSSD-KSČM relationship. All three scenarios are present in the ČSSD debate. The individual steps the ČSSD leaders have been taking also seem to be open in all these three directions.

The leftwing ČSSD, including the democratic socialists in the grassroots, have demanded *genuine rapprochement* with the KSČM for some time: the KSČM's election success in 2002 was applauded throughout the ČSSD, with the exception of the anti-communist stream. The main idea behind a rapprochement is the positive experience of cooperation between the parties at the local level, shared preferences for social justice and equality, and for a strong role of the state in guaranteeing both. In foreign affairs, the ČSSD grassroots share some of

¹⁸ Balín, Vlastimil, *Že by se bolševizace dovršovala?* January 5th, 2006

the positions of the communist mainstream traditionalists — in particular their Euro-scepticism, and their cautious approach towards NATO, the USA and Germany. The formal majority of the two left parties in the parliament has thus been viewed as a real chance to overcome the division of the left and to resist the neo-liberal concept of the ODS. The grassroots would perhaps agree to a governing coalition with the KSČM, even under the present circumstances.

At the national level the higher circles of the ČSSD left view genuine rapprochement rather as a discursive process involving hands-on co-operation, during which the KSČM still has to change and the ČSSD has to emphasise its leftist roots. The conditions, defined by Jiří Paroubek, indicate that he might consider also this scenario. His conditions for genuine rapprochement have been:

- An unambiguous attitude of the KSČM to the crimes committed by the communist regime and by the KSČ itself
- A positive position as regards NATO and co-operation with the USA and Canada
- A positive attitude towards the EU as a political project
- An unqualified acknowledgement of private property rights
- General support for fiscal discipline.

With the exception of the KSČM's negotiable positions regarding budgetary issues, the party is not expected to comply with the above-mentioned conditions in the foreseeable future. Jiří Paroubek thus affirmed that a left-left coalition might become a possibility only after the elections of 2010 or 2014, and not earlier.¹⁹

Pragmatic ad-hoc co-operation is mainly driven by the interest in pushing through the ČSSD's legislative proposals, hence preparing for a successful election campaign in 2006. Secondly, the aim is to secure left-left majority in the Parliament. The third aim would be to tip the unfavourable left-right balance in the Senate and, last but not least, to prevent the re-election of President Václav Klaus in 2008. Paroubek supports former ČSSD Chairman and Prime Minister Miloš Zeman for that post. By doing so, he has secured Zeman's loyalty; whether Paroubek will be tempted to run for President in 2008 himself remains to be seen.

The outcome of the 2006 parliamentary elections will set the political scene for left-left co-operation. Because a majority of ODS and KDU-ČSL members is as unlikely as a majority of

<http://www.balin.cz/phorum.php?idDiskuze=656&phorumId=256>

¹⁹ Paroubek, Jiří (interview) Kdybych sestavoval vládu, uvažoval bych o velké nebo duhové koalici, *Právo*, 3.12.2005

ČSSD and KDU-ČSL members, the only chance forming a government without the KSČM is either a grand coalition or a minority government — right-wing or left-wing, depending on the election's outcome. Even if the ČSSD leaders preclude a coalition with the KSČM, they will seek to renew a nominal leftwing majority in the Parliament, and thus an optimal position for negotiations of the three remaining options: a coalition with the ODS, a "rainbow coalition" with the ODS and the KDU-ČSL, and a ČSSD minority government seeking support across the political spectrum.

The key to the ČSSD's electoral success is a convincing performance of the government in the run up to the elections. Jiří Paroubek thus decided to exploit as fully as possible the potential of the current left-left majority in the Parliament: the ČSSD has not only successfully worked with the KSČM in the legislature; Paroubek did not shy away from using the KSČM to discipline his coalition partners, the KDU-ČSL and the US. The government coalition voted coherently for the budget, and later also for the amendment of the welfare system and the law on public order (in the latter two cases the KSČM voted with the coalition). However, on one other occasion, the KDU-ČSL clearly preferred contacts with the ODS to prepare the ground for a right-wing coalition after the 2006 election. The general impression has been that all political parties have started testing their coalition potential for the period following the next election.²⁰

Of course, the ČSSD has worked also with the ODS in Parliament. However, cooperation was restricted to the "regime-divide" issues (issues linked with attitudes to the pre-1989 regime which thus tend to divide society), such as amending the criminal code, or promoting economic liberalisation — like in the case of a modest rent increase.²¹ Unlike ODS' Chairman Topolánek, who excluded any coalition other than the one with the KDU-ČSL²², Jiří Paroubek avoided narrowing down the strategic choices of the ČSSD. He emphasised that his preference was a coalition with both the ODS and perhaps the KDU-ČSL (a "rainbow coalition").²³ Earlier, however, Paroubek indicated that a minority government with the support of the KSČM would have more legitimacy than a grand coalition with the

²⁰ Holub, *Ve sněmovně*, op.cit.

²¹ The communist party linked its support for the code to the abolishment of the article which penalises the denial of the Nazi and communist genocides.

²² Other representatives of the ODS (like Jan Zahradil), however, indicate that a grand coalition with the ČSSD could be negotiable as long as the ODS would not be the junior partner and if the aim would be a reform of the election law introducing a majority election system.

²³ Paroubek, interview 3.12.2005, op.cit.

conservative ODS. He also rejected a coalition with the ODS in which the ČSSD would be a junior partner.²⁴

In any case, as a result of his pragmatic approach to co-operation with the KSČM, Paroubek prevented what had still seemed inevitable in spring 2005: a freezing of any serious legislative activities until the elections of 2006 or a collapse of the government caused by a loss of discipline of the coalition parties (most notably the KDU-ČSL). Many commentators expected irregular elections before the end of 2005. Yet Paroubek managed to drive all legislative proposals through Parliament with two exceptions, which he will try to push for early 2006 (most importantly the new labour code).

The “*Mitterrandisation*” scenario of integrating the KSČM into the government after the elections and thus sharing its political costs has been widely debated in the ČSSD. Mainly younger members make direct reference to the tactical move of French President Mitterrand in 1981, when he integrated the Communist Party of France into his government, thus causing the decline of the radical left competitor. The anti-communist opponents of this scenario argue that the KSČM is a proud heir of the totalitarian KSČ, and building a coalition with such a partner could cause heavy damage to the ČSSD’s image. Paroubek himself has directly referred to Mitterrand. At the same time, he himself does not see the KSČM as ready for a coalition.

Nonetheless, even without the final stage of co-operation — sharing executive power in a coalition — the ČSSD may well hope to improve its position by trying to:

- Expose the KSČM as a party of revolutionary cliché without a real blueprint for radical change
- Demonstrate the KSČM’s limited capability to deliver in practical politics
- Agitate the internal differentiation of the KSČM and so stimulate its further reform.

To be sure, the conservative circles of the KSČM have not given up their historical rejection of the “reformist” ČSSD. They, too, have an aim: either to convert the ČSSD into an obedient junior partner of the KSČM or to defeat the subservient instrument of the real capitalist rulers.

One aspect characterises all scenarios: the ČSSD under Paroubek will make full use of its role of a senior partner in any left-left co-operation for the first time. Furthermore, Jiří Paroubek’s position is much stronger than that of Vojtěch Filip: while 42 percent prefer Paroubek as the next Czech Prime Minister, Filip has the support of only 12 percent. In addition, Filip’s

²⁴ Paroubek, Jiří (interview) Jako slabší partner s ODS do vlády určitě nepůjdeme, *Právo* 29.10.2005

position within his own party is not particularly strong: only 62 percent of KSČM supporters would back him for the post of the Prime Minister, while 91 percent of ČSSD followers would support Paroubek for that post.²⁵

IV. The Limits of Left-left Rapprochement

The KSČM has become more acceptable after Vojtěch Filip, the ‘smiling-face’ of the party, replaced the uninspiring Chairman Grebeníček. Both Zeman and Klaus described Filip as being like Hungarian reform-communist Gyula Horn. Zeman does not see the KSČM as a Stalinist party, but just as a radical left party with which he “can agree on some points and disagree on others”.²⁶ The preference of the still influential ex-Prime Minister Zeman has been for a minority government.²⁷ Filip has already expressed his support if Zeman runs for President.²⁸

Nonetheless, there are limits to the rapprochement of the Czech left.

First, as shown above, the two parties differ substantially when it comes to *political strategies*. The ČSSD has gradually developed into a mainstream Western social-democratic party. While the membership tends to traditional democratic socialism, the focus of the leadership on broader support has shifted the ČSSD towards becoming a catchall party since the late 1990s. More recently, Jiří Paroubek (like Miloš Zeman in the mid-1990s) has increased the party's leftist appeal while gaining considerable strategic flexibility and autonomy of action and seeking to turn the ČSSD into an effective 'election party'.

The KSČM has remained a 'mass programmatic party', internally divided and programmatically ambiguous. While the disciplined traditionalist membership base ensures the party's survival, it severely limits the party's room for manoeuvre. The party's conservatism has thus been inbuilt, its ability to reform circumscribed and its strategic flexibility restricted. As such, the KSČM cannot be expected to take bold decisions, or even to come forward and deal with Paroubek's conditions for building a left-left coalition.

Secondly, there are considerable *ideological differences*. The “cultural hegemony” of the conservatives, reaffirmed daily by the party's *Haló noviny* newspaper, makes the KSČM an uneasy partner for any ideologically informed non-communist left. A strong inclination towards an anti-Western and anti-liberal political, economical and cultural stance has been

²⁵ Paroubek would be best PM of all election leaders — poll in press, *ČTK*, 23.11.2005

²⁶ Mitrofanov, Alexandr, Pukrlata doleva a nový člen klubu, *Právo*, 19.12.2005

combined with unqualified admiration for “socialist” Cuba and China; China and Vietnam have been viewed as a role model for the left in the world.²⁹

More generally, there is a great deal of ideological competition between the KSČM and the social democrats. The KSČM’s programme between 1990 and 1991 included the concept of democratic socialism as elaborated on by the Socialist International, but replaced it with the term ‘modern socialism’, and merely ‘socialism’ later on, to distinguish itself clearly from the non-communist left. The KSČM has a similar ambiguous attitude towards the welfare state. Moreover, it still perceives class struggle as the driving force of historical development, and seeks a structure of ownership where some 75-80 percent means of production lie in various forms of collective ownership, rather than in private hands.

On the other hand, the KSČM’s programme differs little from the ČSSD’s programme when it comes to domestic politics. As Vojtěch Filip, he himself an active proponent of ‘the Chinese model’, argues, 60 percent of the ČSSD’s and the KSČM’s programmes are compatible. He describes the communist programme as merely “more rational”, seeking more state-run employment schemes and the expansion of the public sector.³⁰

In any case, the name of the party, the preservation of the cold-war anti-Western rhetoric, the class-struggle ideology and the historical narrative symbolise the reasons why the KSČM is still unacceptable, mainly for the leadership and the anti-communist stream in the ČSSD. What is more, a shift towards more liberal thinking has been integrated into the ČSSD’s party line; after all, even then Prime Minister Špidla called on the upper class to co-operate more willingly, arguing that the ČSSD is the only party which can secure social peace.³¹

Thirdly, there still are certain institutional and human resources limits, mainly for the KSČM. With exceptions, such as Deputy Chairman Jiří Dolejš, MEP Miloslav Ransdorf and Senator Vlastimil Balín, the party has few qualified and skilled politicians or staff who can deliver new ideas. The ČSSD also faces a shortage of ready-made draft position papers that could inspire the internal discourse in the party and create the basis for an intensive left-left debate. Fourthly, the attitude towards the former regime represents a substantial *regime divide* in left-left relations. Even after the official expression of remorse regarding the 1950s, the KSČM has been unable or unwilling to free itself from its Stalinist stigma. According to some

²⁷ Zeman praises Paroubek, for minority cabinet, ČTK, 18.12.2005, http://www.ceskenoviny.cz/news/index_view.php?id=163408

²⁸ Mitrofanov, Alexandr, Levý blok už Klause nemusí, *Právo*, 26.11.2005

²⁹ Press Release of the CPBM. At the conclusion of the International Conference of Communist and Left Parties, Prague, 23-24 April 2005, <http://www.kscm.cz/viewDocument.asp?document=2707>, viewed on 31.12.2005

³⁰ Filip, Vojtěch (interview) Nejen komunisté říkají, že bývalý režim byl lepší, *Hospodářské noviny*, 29.12.2005

³¹ Mitrofanov, Alexandr, Sociálně tržní mládí vpřed, *Právo*, 21.12.2005

analysts, had the KSČM managed to do so, the ČSSD would have invited it to create a left-left coalition right after the elections of 2002.³² Instead, the KSČM has never supported any legislative bills that sought to deal with the communist regime's historical legacy, including the bills on compensation for victims of the regime, of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and of the victims of illegal deportations to the USSR after World War II.

The KSČM itself has been deeply split over the issues of the history. While the modernisers/neo-communists have been explicitly critical, the conservative 'cultural hegemony' has reproduced the communist historical canon of 1970-1980s with little modification. Similarly, in the KSČM the end of the communist regime has mostly been understood as a counter-revolution, while the ČSSD sees the same as a revolution, or at least as liberation from the communists' total political control. And, unlike the East German PDS, the KSČM has never expressed regret for the forced merger of the ČSSD in 1948.

Fifth, there are substantial *political limits* on left-left co-operation. The link between the ČSSD and the KSČM has been welfare state issues. However, the ČSSD is preparing to conduct a more Blairite *welfare state policy* after the elections of 2006: it has adopted a policy of gradual deregulation of rents, and a level of payments for healthcare is also unavoidable.³³

Obviously, the KSČM's *attitude towards 'socialist states'* represents an important test case for the party's approach to human rights and other democratic principles. The glorification of China, Cuba and even North Korea as socialist states, and the presentation of China as a political and economic model for the international left make the Czech communists a difficult partner not only for the ČSSD, but also for most of the European radical left.

The *attitude towards the EU* has been even more important: the ČSSD has been politically one of the most pro-European actors in the Czech Republic. However, the KSČM has not yet formed a coherent policy on integration. While the modernisers/neo-communists developed a leftist euro-activist position of 'EU a la carte', the conservatives tend towards a euro-negativist attitude, emphasising the 'class nature' of the EU. The traditionalist majority of the party, while being mostly euro-sceptic, has experienced the positive effects of the EU-accession; at least the policy-oriented group may thus move towards a more pragmatic approach to the EU.

On *security issues*, the ČSSD has reached a general support for NATO membership after a long and painful debate, and only nearly survived the internal dispute over the bombing of

³² Mitrofanov, Alexandr, Půlkroky ke sbližení, *Právo*, 14.09.2005

³³ Mitrofanov, Sociálně tržní mládí vpřed, op.cit.

Kosovo in 1999. It opposed the war in Iraq but supported the operation in Afghanistan. The ESDP has been seen as the solution for the European security dilemma.³⁴

The KSČM has been split as regards security. The modernisers/neo-communists have argued in favour of the transition of NATO into a pillar of European security, and supported the ESDP and the international mission in Afghanistan in principle. The conservatives and most of the traditionalists see NATO as an instrument of aggression and demand that the Czech Republic abandons its military structure. In addition, they reject the ESDP as a militarization of the EU, and perceive the Afghanistan operation as a NATO and US occupation.

III. Conclusions: Pragmatism, not Change

The pragmatic and assertive policy style of Prime Minister Jiří Paroubek has addressed anew the traditional question of left-left co-operation in the Czech Republic. Different scenarios of such co-operation are imaginable: genuine rapprochement, pragmatic ad-hoc cooperation and a 'Miterrandisation' of Czech politics (a weakening of the KSČM by its integration into a governing coalition, led by the ČSSD).

The real options are, however, limited primarily by the nature of the KSČM. Compared with the KSČ's pre-1989 programme, its direct successor, the KSČM, has moved very close to a traditional social-democratic programme. However, as long as the 'coalition of leftist retreat' (the dominant conservative stream supported by the traditionalist majority) enjoys its 'cultural hegemony' over the KSČM, the ČSSD-KSČM cooperation and dialogue will remain a rather pragmatic exercise. On a number of factors of ideology and historical memory, on foreign and security policy and on integration, the conservative-led KSČM continues to differ substantially from the ČSSD. A straightforward coalition at the national level has so far been excluded by both sides: the KSČM leadership seeks to prevent a diluting of the party's communist image and thus their control over it, while the ČSSD elites (and less so the grassroots) see the KSČM as only half reformed. Overcoming what Kunštát calls the "ghettoization" of the KSČM³⁵ is neither the aim of the KSČM leaders nor of their ČSSD counterparts. However, the present situation enables both parties to continue their cooperation, including the parliamentary agenda. Such cooperation will remain *non-exclusive*,

³⁴ Základní (dlouhodobý) program ČSSD (2005), p.21.

http://www.cssd.cz/soubory/422010/Dlouhodoby%20program_I.pdf,

³⁵ Kunštát, Daniel, Veřejná podpora KSČM po roce 1989: historická východiska, politické a sociální souvislosti, perspektivy, *Naše společnost*, 2004, http://www.cvvm.cas.cz/upl/nase_spolecnost/100033s_Kunstat-kscm.pdf

issue-oriented, ad-hoc and low-key: while the ČSSD and the overwhelming conservative stream in the KSČM pursue different strategies and face different policy options, pragmatic co-operation in specific areas like the preservation of the welfare state, where their interests overlap, occurs most often. Programmatic and political differences and competition will continue to develop in parallel. The best outcome of the 2006 elections from the perspective of conservatives in the KSČM would be a minority ČSSD government dependent exclusively on the KSČM's support. A grand coalition of the ODS and the ČSSD (particularly if dominated by the ODS) would also help the conservatives in their strategy of underlining the radical opposition image of the KSČM and weakening the ČSSD. Any other option is likely to undermine the legitimacy of the conservatives' control over the KSČM in the mid-term future.

Election results of the ČSSD and the KSČM 1992-2005

	1992	1996	1998	2000-reg	2002	2004 EP	2004-reg
ČSSD	6,52%	26,4%	32,3%	14,7%	30,2%	8,8%	14%
KSČM	14,05%	10,3%	11%	21,1%	18,5%	20,3%	19,7%

Source: <http://www.volby.cz/>

2000-reg, 2004-reg – elections into regional assemblies

2004 EP – first elections into the European Parliament

Preferences of the four parties which are likely to enter the Parliament in June 2006 elections

	6/04	12/2004	4/2005	5/2005	6/2005	9/2005	10/2005	11/2005	12/2005
ODS	30,5	32,5	31	30	27,5	28,5	29	26	29,5
ČSSD	11,5	11,5	10,4	16	18	23	22,5	24,5	24
KSČM	16	14,5	16,5	14,5	13,5	12	14,5	12,5	12,5
KDU-ČSL	7,5	9	8,5	7,5	6,5	6	7	7,5	8

Source: Kunštát, Daniel, Stranické preference v prosinci 2005, Centrum pro výzkum veřejného mínění, Sociologický ústav akademie věd, Tisková zpráva, 22.12.2005

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